

# HEALTH AWARENESS

## WHAT IS CLOSTRIDIUM DIFFICILE (C. DIFF)?

C. diff. is a spore-forming bacteria that can be found in soil, air, human and animal feces, and on most surfaces. It does not create infection until it grows in large numbers in the intestinal tract; usually of people taking antibiotics. It is not confined to health care facilities. It is also a growing problem among otherwise healthy people. Although the infection can usually be controlled with treatment, virulent strains are now appearing that resist traditional treatment. The use of antibiotic therapy, proton pump inhibitors, GI surgery and or manipulation, advanced age, immuno-compromising illness, and long hospital stays have been identified as risk factors for developing C. diff.-associated disease (CDAD). Some people who are infected with C. diff. never become sick, though they can still spread the infection. Others may experience watery diarrhea, blood or pus in their stools, fever, loss of appetite, nausea, and abdominal pain or tenderness. C. diff., at times, can be a life-threatening infection; so vigilance is important.

C. diff is spread through the fecal-oral route; which means from poor toileting hygiene. It can live on environmental surfaces for months. Any surface, device, or material that becomes contaminated with feces may serve as a reservoir for the C. diff. spores. The spores are usually transferred via dirty hands that have touched a contaminated surface. In approximately 23% of people, CDAD will resolve within 3 days after discontinuing the antibiotic medication that they are receiving. If that is not successful, a 10 day course of another type of antibiotic may be ordered by the healthcare professional. Sometimes, an additional course of medication is needed if the symptoms do not disappear with the first course. One of the most important steps in stopping C. diff. infections is to use antibiotics judiciously. Every year in the US, antibiotics are prescribed for viral infections that are not helped by these medications. Taking a wait and see attitude with simple ailments may often be the best course.

Other important infection prevention and control measures are to use soap and water for hand washing. Hands should be washed for at least 15 seconds. While alcohol-based hand rub cleansers are effective in killing most bacteria, they are NOT effective in killing C. diff. spores and therefore should not be used when coming in contact with people who have or are suspected of having CDAD. Wear gloves if working with someone diagnosed with C. diff. and wear a gown to protect clothing if soiling is likely. Adequate cleaning and disinfecting of the environment daily with a chlorine based product is crucial in stopping the spread of C. diff. An EPA registered hypochlorite-based disinfectant can be used or household chlorine bleach at a 1:10 dilution rate may also be used. Remember, C. diff. is a preventable disease but it takes everyone practicing good infection prevention and control measures to stop its spread.

Lisa Graves, R.N.

## ARE YOU PROMOTING YOUR ORAL HEALTH?

Healthy teeth promote healthy bodies. It's all connected. Oral health goes beyond having white teeth and no cavities. According to the U.S. Surgeon General's Report on Oral Health, published in 2000, "the mouth (including the gums, teeth and jawbone) is a mirror for general well-being". A growing body of research now links gum disease to heart disease as well as stroke, diabetes, respiratory problems and low-birth weight babies. When your mouth and teeth are disease-free, your risks of developing other diseases throughout your life may be reduced. Because gum disease is usually painless, many people may not even realize they have it until it reaches an advanced stage. Some of the warning signs are persistent bad breath, a bad taste in the mouth or gums that bleed. At that time, teeth may become loose and need to be extracted. The main cause of gum disease is bacteria, which is found

in plaque. Plaque is a sticky colorless film that constantly forms on your teeth and tongue.

The basic principles of good oral health are simple and take just a few minutes each day. Brush your teeth with a tooth paste containing fluoride at least twice a day. Once a day, use floss or an inter-dental cleaner to clean between teeth to remove food that your toothbrush missed. Change your toothbrush at least every three months or earlier if the toothbrush looks worn. A new toothbrush can remove more plaque than one that is old. Eat healthy meals. Cut down on tooth decay by brushing after meals and not snacking on sugary or starchy foods between meals. Your dentist may suggest that you do different things or prescribe special treatments to keep your mouth healthy. Remember, it's all connected. Make caring for your teeth and gums the first thing on your list! **Susan Poore, RN**

## Vaccine

### Recommendations

#### 1. Seasonal Influenza

- Children aged 6 months up to their 19th birthday
- Health care workers
- Pregnant women or those who might get pregnant
- People 50 years of age and older
- People living in nursing homes and long-term care facilities
- People with chronic health care conditions
- Household contacts & out-of-home caregivers for persons at risk for influenza complications

#### 2. Zoster ('Shingles')

Shingles vaccine was recently recommended by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices to reduce the risk of shingles and its associated pain in people 60 years old or older.

#### 3. Pneumococcal

The pneumococcal conjugate vaccine, PCV7, licensed in 2000, is the first pneumococcal vaccine that can be used in children under the age of 2 years.

Pneumovax® and Pnu-Immune® are polysaccharide vaccines (PPV23) that are currently recommended for use in all adults who are older than 65 years of age and for persons who are 2 years and older and at high risk for disease (e.g., sickle cell disease, HIV infection, or other immunocompromising condition.)

#### 4. Pertussis

Whooping cough — known medically as pertussis — is a highly contagious respiratory tract infection. Although it initially resembles an ordinary cold, whooping cough may eventually turn more serious, particularly in infants. Whooping cough is most contagious before the coughing starts. The best way to prevent it is through vaccinations. The childhood vaccine is called DTaP. The whooping cough booster vaccine for adolescents and adults is called Tdap. Both protect against whooping cough, tetanus, and diphtheria.

-From the CDC Webpage